

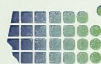
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Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities

Annual Report 2007/2008



Alberta



THE PREMIER'S COUNCIL
ON THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Letter of Transmittal

July 9, 2008

The Honourable Ed Stelmach
Premier of Alberta
307 Legislature Building
Edmonton, Alberta
T5K 2B6

Dear Honourable Premier:

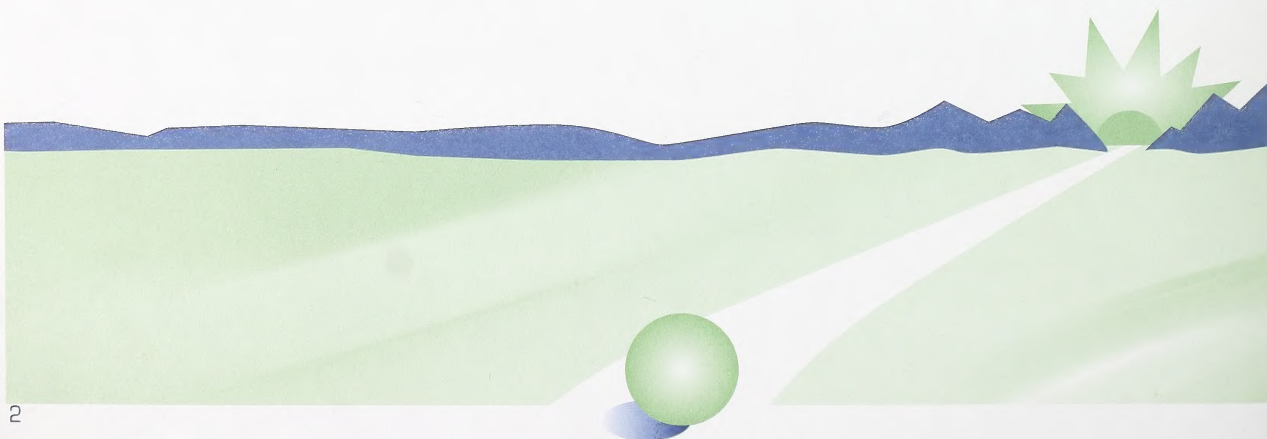
I have the honour of presenting the nineteenth Annual Report of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities. This report covers the activities undertaken by your Council during the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008. It is submitted in accordance with s.7 (1) of the *Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities Act* for your presentation to the Legislative Assembly.

Respectfully submitted,



Marlin Styner

Chair, Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities



Reflections of the former Chair



When I decided to seek the nomination to run in the 1997 Alberta Election, I expressed a commitment to social issues and believed that public education would be where I could make the greatest impact. Therefore, the phone call from the Minister of Health asking me to chair the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities was unexpected. The Minister told me that my work with special education gave me some experience with disability issues. In retrospect I now realize how little I knew! With much input from the disability community, Council members and staff, I have come to understand disability issues in much more depth.

Out of all the issues facing Albertans, disability issues are among the most compelling and it is imperative that they be addressed by government. Unfortunately, the concerns of people with disabilities are often lost among all the other issues affecting Albertans that government must deal with.

I believe the reason that disability issues often go unaddressed is that the public is generally unaware of the extent of the challenges faced by persons with disabilities. While there are dedicated people attempting to move awareness of disability issues into the mainstream, they face many challenges. The majority of persons with disabilities expend their energies dealing with their day to day challenges resulting from their disability and have little energy or time to effectively advocate for themselves. Therefore, their voice is not often heard and disability issues are left off the political agenda.

It has been the directive of the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities to reflect the views, issues, and visions of people with disabilities and ensure that this message is heard by the Alberta Government. During my time as Chair, the Council has continually found new and innovative ways to move the disability agenda forward. Among the initiatives that stand out in my mind is the Council's initiation of celebrations for the International Day of Disabled Persons around Alberta. These celebrations, now held in seven communities across the province, help to educate the public on disability issues and celebrate the progress being made in our province. In conjunction with these events, Council created the Awards of Excellence to acknowledge individuals and organizations that have gone above and beyond to create an environment that is inclusive for people with disabilities.

On a personal level, I was pleased to receive support from my colleagues in the Legislature for the two Private Member's Bills I initiated as an MLA; the Barrier Free Design Committee with the Safety Codes Council and the Service Dog Act. While these two pieces of legislation were not directed by the Council; my work and relationships with the members greatly influenced and encouraged my actions.

Over my ten years as Chair I have had the opportunity to work with many Council members, each bringing a wealth of unique experience and knowledge, and want to thank them all for their hard work and dedication. As I pass the torch to the new Chair, I wish them, along with the rest of Council, success in all their future endeavours in continuing on the path to full inclusion of persons with disabilities in Alberta.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rob Loughheed".

Rob Loughheed,

Former chair, Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities



Year in Review

Over the last year, the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities has continued to work toward achieving full citizenship for Albertans with disabilities. Council members coordinate and participate in various activities within the community to create awareness of issues and barriers faced by people with disabilities. They also provide advice and recommendations to government on the status of disability issues.



International Day of Disabled Persons

On December 3, 2007, International Day of Disabled Persons (IDDP; now the International Day of Persons with Disabilities) was recognized in communities across Alberta. The theme, *Nothing About Us Without Us*, reminded people that individuals with disabilities should be a part of the decision-making process in programs, policies, and decisions that affect them.

Each year, the Premier's Council works with a committee of community representatives to organize events in Fort McMurray, Edmonton, Calgary, Red Deer, Grande Prairie, Lethbridge and Medicine Hat. The Premier's Council leads the provincial coordination and provides promotional materials such as posters,

brochures, stickers, media kits, newspaper ads and a radio public service announcement. These are distributed across the province to encourage Albertans to celebrate the achievements of persons with disabilities and get involved in making full citizenship a reality for all.

The Premier's Council Awards of Excellence are presented at the International Day of Disabled Persons (IDDP) celebrations each year. These awards were created in 2003 to highlight the outstanding work of individuals or organizations for enhancing or enriching the lives of persons with disabilities.



Awards of Excellence 2007

Gary McPherson Leadership Award:

Faith Jahelka

The Gary McPherson Award recognizes individual Albertans who have demonstrated outstanding leadership or achievement in enhancing or enriching the lives of persons with disabilities. The 2007 winner was Red Deer resident Ms. Faith Jahelka.

More than 12 years have gone by since a work-related brain injury sustained by Faith Jahelka's husband changed her life forever. Since that day, she has been an unrelenting advocate for survivors of brain injury and their caregivers. A founding member, long-time volunteer and chair of the Alberta Brain Injury Caregiver Society, Faith has played a lead role in ensuring the voices of people with brain injury are heard.

She has worked hard to raise public awareness of brain injury by speaking out at conferences, networking in hospitals and agencies, educating decision-makers, and speaking to the media about the needs and challenges of survivors and their families.

This leadership and persistence was responsible, in part, for the creation of the provincial government's Alberta Brain Injury Initiative in 2000. Faith continues to be a brain injury community barometer for government and health authorities interested in meaningful public policy, program development, and service evaluation.

Faith is a Red Deer resident but has helped many families throughout Alberta. She has earned the respect of survivors, caregivers, health professionals, bureaucrats, and politicians. "Faith has been a tireless leader who has worked to promote self-help and to ensure on-going support through the provision of support group meetings," said one supporter. Another stated that, "Faith relentlessly advocates on behalf of all family caregivers," noting that she has organized more than a dozen retreats and forum days for caregivers in the Calgary region.

Awards of Excellence

Three awards were presented at IDDP ceremonies across Alberta. These were in the categories of education, community, and public awareness.

Education: Calgary Public Library

The Calgary Public Library has a long tradition of providing collections, programs, services, and facilities in a way that makes them accessible to Calgarians of all ages

and abilities. The library staff has demonstrated a consistent commitment to providing an inclusive library service.

In 2004, the library opened a Diversity Services department to integrate and coordinate accessible

services at its 17 different locations. This has led to resource enhancements for customers who have visual, cognitive, or physical disabilities. For example, the library has nine Accessible Library Experience (ALEX) adaptive technology workstations in eight locations. ALEX features adjustable furniture, Braille display/reader/printer, voice recognition, talking software, different keyboard overlays, and magnification software.

There are other adaptive tools in the library, such as closed circuit television to enlarge print 40 to 60 times, audio players, Digital Accessible Information System (DAISY) talking books, and TTY eliminates barriers that would otherwise prevent persons with disabilities from enjoying literature, film, or music. The Calgary Public Library has a homebound readers program, libraries in residence program, and other services to bring the library to readers who cannot get to the library. The library continues to work closely with local community organizations to understand needs and adapt services so persons with disabilities can have access to its many programs and services.

The Award of Excellence in Education is awarded to a person, team, or organization that has made a significant contribution to a barrier-free, inclusive program, classroom, or facility.



Community: Grande Prairie Residential Society

The Grande Prairie Residential Society (GPRS) was formed in 1986 by a concerned group of individuals who wanted to provide affordable and accessible housing for persons with disabilities. Today, GPRS has three major housing projects to its credit, operates 32 units, and provides space for people to network and to support each other in reaching their potential.

GPRS staff members are leaders in the community. They are raising awareness of the needs of persons with disabilities – not just for housing but for transportation, accessibility, and other issues within the city of Grande Prairie.

The values and benefits of having persons with disabilities living in the community have become self-evident to the people of Grande Prairie through GPRS' efforts. It continues to work on resolving hard-to-house issues in the city and advocate for changes that will improve the quality of life for persons with disabilities.

The Award of Excellence in Community is awarded to a person, team, or organization that has made a significant contribution to a barrier-free, inclusive environment within their community.

Public Awareness: Bill Hurley

Mr. Bill Hurley was born with Downs Syndrome. Since 2004, he has been the game night entertainer at Calgary Vipers baseball games. Through this job, Bill has exposed tens of thousands of Calgarians to the abilities of persons with disabilities.

Fans look forward to his energetic performances and he interacts effectively with all ages. He is well-respected by his employer, players, and fans and is considered very good at reflecting the Vipers' image as a loving, caring, and fun organization.

In addition to his accomplishments as a professional entertainer, Bill is a high school graduate, a Special Olympics athlete, a competitive weightlifter and he owns an audio-visual company. His accomplishments on and off the baseball field publicly demonstrate that persons with disabilities can fully participate in society if given the opportunity to do so.

The Award of Excellence in Public Awareness is awarded to a person, team, or organization that has increased the public's awareness of the benefits and value of a barrier-free, inclusive environment.

Premier's Council meetings

The Premier's Council met face-to-face for three days in May and held several meetings via teleconference.

The Premier's Council met in Edmonton from May 10 to 12. During the meetings, Council members received presentations from the Alberta Government's Personnel

Administration Office, an update on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Emergency Plans project, an update on the new *Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) Act* and regulations, and a presentation from the Federal Office for Disability Issues.



Premier's Council Committees

The Premier's Council has two sub committees: the Policy and Program Review Committee and the Communications Committee.

Policy and Program Review Committee

The mandate of the Policy and Program Review Committee is to:

- Identify and review current and emerging issues and policies at all levels of government affecting and concerning the status of persons with disabilities.
- Review the provision of funding, services, and programs to persons with disabilities.
- Make referrals and recommendations, consult and collaborate with all levels of government, government agencies, volunteer associations, businesses, universities, and other persons on matters affecting and concerning the status of persons with disabilities.

Emergency Planning

In 2006, the Premier's Council partnered with the Alberta Emergency Management Agency on a project to look at the inclusion of people with disabilities in municipal emergency plans. During Hurricane Katrina, people with disabilities were among those in the southern US most negatively affected. These unfortunate events sparked questions during Council's strategic planning process about the state of emergency management for Albertans with disabilities. Although municipal, provincial and federal emergency planning agencies have made significant

gains in emergency preparedness, the specific functional needs of persons with disabilities do not appear to have been effectively incorporated into the mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery components of emergency management in Alberta.

In order to ensure that people with disabilities are included in municipal emergency plans, the Alberta Emergency Management Agency and the Premier's Council worked together to develop workshops for municipal emergency management representatives on the functional needs approach. This approach focuses on a person's specific functional need rather than on their disability. It encompasses people of all ages and abilities. There is also an emphasis on ensuring that people with functional needs are included in the planning process. The course was launched on January 21, 2008, and will be ready to present to municipalities in the fall of 2008.

Disability Information Line Report

Albertans with disabilities living in the community who require support relating to a disability are often unaware of the government-related services and programs that would best assist them to meet their independence needs. While current information sources, such as Service Alberta, appear to be addressing some of the citizen concerns from persons with disabilities, large numbers of individuals report that they bounce between four different programs or service areas within one ministry, and sometimes between other ministries before their program or service

concern is addressed. The Policy Committee has commissioned a report exploring a single integrated disability information line as one option that might help alleviate this concern.

In November 2007, a private contractor was hired to complete a preliminary analysis of the possibility of a disability information line in Alberta. The research included an environmental scan of current information lines, both general and demographic specific, that are available in Alberta, disability information lines in other jurisdictions, and interviews with some local stakeholders.

The final report offers possible options for how Council might proceed regarding a disability information line for persons between the ages of 18 and 64 in Alberta. The report does not advocate for any one option over another but does state that some options, such as creating an entirely new information line, may not be the best option. The report will be submitted to the Alberta government for consideration.

Additional Work

The Chair of the Policy Committee participates on Alberta Education's Special Needs Education Committee to provide advice and feedback on education policies for students with disabilities. Members attended the Children and Youth Initiative Committee, Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) annual Director Conference, the Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities (ACCD) open house, and an Emergency Planning Workshop on functional needs. Members also participated in community meetings regarding the Service Dog legislation.

Communications Committee

The mandate of the Communications Committee is to:

- Develop and annually update a communications strategy that supports the Premier's Council strategic plan.
- Oversee development of Premier's Council communications materials and supports. (e.g. newsletter, brochures and displays).
- Identify communication gaps between the Premier's Council and its stakeholders and provide recommendations for filling these communication gaps.

History of the Council

To recognize the 20th Anniversary of Premier's Council, the Communications Committee oversaw the development of a retrospective of the Council's history. The idea was originally brought forward by Council member Austin Mardon and was approved by Council at the October 18, 2007 Council teleconference. Two authors, who previously worked with Mardon, were contracted in November to gather and compile information on Council's history with direction from the Council secretariat. The material covers the history of the Council and the disability rights movement from the Rick Hanson Man in Motion Tour stop in Edmonton in 1988 to 2008. The retrospective uses previous annual reports, publications by the Council, and news clippings as references. It also includes interviews with previous and current council members, chairs, and directors. Input from select politicians and disability advocates involved with Council is also incorporated.

Alberta Guide to Accessible Meetings and Conferences

People with disabilities routinely face accessibility barriers when attending meetings and conferences. These barriers usually exist due to a lack of awareness among organizers on how to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities. To help event planners meet the needs of attendees with disabilities, the Premier's Council is developing an *Alberta Guide to Accessible Meetings and Conferences*.

The Premier's Council's intention is to educate event planners and to offer them clear concrete steps on how to plan, organize, and conduct an accessible event. The guide is designed for use across government as well as the private and voluntary sectors. This publication is an Alberta version of an existing federal *Guide to Accessible Meetings and Conferences*. The federal guide has been used as a template with the permission of the Federal Office for Disability Issues.

The Alberta guide is written using a functional based approach. Functional based planning takes the emphasis off the attendee's specific disability and instead focuses on the functional needs that result in that disability. When these functional needs are met, the attendee is able to participate in the event freely. Some examples within the guide of how to meet functional needs include:

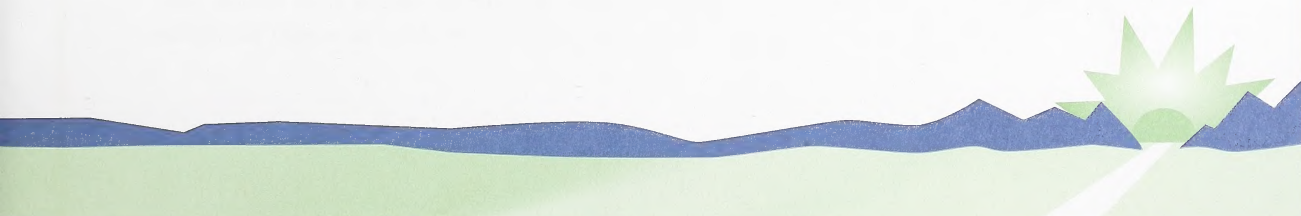
- Offering all documents in alternate formats.
- Ensuring the venue is wheelchair accessible (including washrooms).
- Booking sign language interpreters, captioners, and interveners.

In November 2007, under the direction of the Communications sub-committee, the Premier's Council secretariat began work on the guide. The secretariat contracted an outside party to write the guide with direction from a steering committee comprising representatives from within the Disability Supports Division. A final draft of the guide was submitted on March 31, 2008. At this time, it was decided by Council and the Steering Committee that additional consultation was needed before the guide could be released. Community consultations with the Alberta Disability Forum, Edmonton Chamber of Commerce, Alberta Hotel Association, and several other relevant organizations will be completed.

The guide is scheduled for release in the fall of 2008.

Additional Work

In 2007/2008, committee members produced and distributed the *Disability in Focus* newsletter to disability organizations across Alberta. The newsletter highlights activities and events held by the Premier's Council throughout the year. Members of the committee attended events and trade fairs held by disability organizations and other groups to promote the work of the Council.



Appendix I: 2007/2008 Council Members

Mr. Rob Lougheed, former chair

Rob Lougheed spent most of his adult life in the field of education, with over 28 years of experience as an Alberta educator. In addition to his position as Chair and as MLA for Strathcona, Mr. Lougheed served as a member of many committees including: Treasury Board, the Standing Policy Committee on Health and Community Living, the Capital Region Caucus, the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, and the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders, and Printing. Mr. Lougheed also chaired the MLA Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) Review Committee. Rob Lougheed resigned as chair of the Premier's Council on March 3, 2008.

Mr. Mike Hambly

Mr. Mike Hambly of Calgary is a member of a number of committees, including the Access Calgary Advisory Committee, the Advisory Committee on Accessibility, and many other disability committees. He currently works with The Canadian Paraplegic Association in which his role is to decrease barriers for people with disabilities in the area of employment and to help individuals find work. He brings a unique perspective in both having a dual disability of total blindness and paraplegia and working for a disability organization. He also works with a guide dog that has been specifically trained to guide him in his manual wheelchair. He is self-employed through his business, Braille It, which converts information into Braille.

Mr. Austin Mardon, Ph.D.

Dr. Mardon of Edmonton has been a member of several different organizations, including the Edmonton Public Library Board, the Alberta Disabilities Forum, the Edmonton Clubhouse Society, the Schizophrenia Society of Alberta Edmonton Chapter, the Champions Centre and the Schizophrenia Society of Alberta Provincial Chapter. He lives with a mental illness (schizophrenia) and believes that the inclusion of people with mental illness in the community is important, as it can substantially improve their quality of life.

Mr. Greg McMeekin

Mr. Greg McMeekin, born and raised in Calgary, was the first person with a severe physical disability to be integrated into the regular school system in Calgary. Through hard work and determination, Greg graduated from high school and then earned his Bachelor of Arts Honours Degree in Mass Communication from Carleton University in 2001 and still carries those values with him in all he does. He has worked with the City of Calgary Parks and Recreation – Recreational Services for the Disabled. He is a member of the Calgary Resicare Society Board of Directors, the Accessible Housing Society of Calgary Board of Directors, and the Community Relations Advisory Committee for the Calgary Handi-Bus Association. He is proud to be a member of organizations that work to enhance the lives of Calgarians with disabilities and considers it an honour and privilege to serve Albertans with disabilities.

Mr. Lawrence Noel

Lawrence Noel of Bonnyville has been an advocate for persons with disabilities for several years. He lives with a disability and has been an active advocate on behalf of persons with disabilities not only within his own community, but also through cross-community and provincial boards such as the Bonnyville Community Council and the Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities. He is currently president of the People First of northern Alberta, as well as president of the Self Advocate East Network in northeast Alberta.

Ms. Diane Ridley

Diane Ridley of Thorsby brings a cross-disability perspective to the Premier's Council and a wide range of experience with issues that affect persons with disabilities living in rural areas, including transportation and isolation. She has served on several different boards at the municipal level and has extensive experience with numerous government programs including the former Handicapped Children's Services, Alberta Aids to Daily Living, Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped and Special Needs Assistance for Seniors. Ms. Ridley also has a personal commitment to advocacy on behalf of persons with disabilities as her adult daughter has had a disability since birth.

Mr. Robie Scholefield

Robie Scholefield is the past executive director of the Alberta Association of the Deaf. He has several years of volunteer and work experience within the deaf community and has been involved at local and provincial levels in advocating for persons with various disabilities for more than 20 years. Mr. Scholefield brings a unique perspective to the Premier's Council as the first-appointed member who is deaf. He is dedicated to improving the quality of life of persons with disabilities.

Mr. Marlin Styner

Marlin Styner of Red Deer has volunteered and worked within the disability community since 1982. He has been a member of several different committees that deal with disability issues such as the Canadian Paraplegic Association Advocacy Committee, the Provincial Barrier-Free Transportation Committee, the Spinal Cord Injury Collaboration Initiative and the Advisory Committee on Accessible Transportation (National). He has been an advocate for persons with disabilities and has been a presenter for the SMARTRISK Heroes program, the Prevent Alcohol and Risk-Related Trauma in Youth (P.A.R.T.Y.) Program, and the Junior P.A.R.T.Y. Program.



Suite 1110, HSBC Building
10055 - 106 Street
Edmonton, AB T5J 2Y2

Ph: (780) 422-1095
or toll free 1-800-272-8841

www.seniors.gov.ab.ca/CSS/premiers_council

E-mail: pcspd@gov.ab.ca